

# Canadian Military History

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Volume 17 | Issue 1

Article 4

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4-26-2012

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### Recommended Citation

Dickson, Paul (2008) "Harry Crerar and an Army for Strategic Effect," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.  
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol17/iss1/4>

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# Harry Crerar and an Army for Strategic Effect

**Paul Dickson**

Few people did as much to shape Canada's Second World War effort, and no single person did as much to shape the Canadian army, as did General H.D.G. "Harry" Crerar. As chief of the general staff during the critical year and a half following the fall of France in June 1940, he was the primary architect of First Canadian Army, established the conditions for the army's training and expansion, and advised the government to dispatch troops to Hong Kong. As a corps commander, he campaigned for Canadian involvement in the Dieppe raid. And, by 1944, he had assumed command of the army, eventually leading a combined Commonwealth army – the largest ever commanded by a Canadian – during the Rhineland offensive. His views on the form Canada's military contribution should take became policy, even though many opposed them, including Prime Minister Mackenzie King.

Crerar's achievements (and failures) are explainable, in part, by the nature of the crisis facing Canada and the Commonwealth during the Second World War. Nazi Germany was on the verge of victory in the summer of 1940 and the logic of that situation seemed to dictate, at least in hindsight, that Canada, united in the face of this clear threat to national survival, indeed to western civilization, commit itself to an all-out war effort. From that starting point, Canada's military effort – a full field army (First Canadian Army) and at war's end, the third largest navy and the fourth largest air force – seemed logical. But there was nothing predetermined about Canada's war effort. In the words of a recent critical review of a book on the "fateful choices" made that summer, "more than most periods in history, the summer of 1940 was pregnant with a veritable brood of...plausible futures."<sup>1</sup>

That was true for Canada as well. But Crerar's ability to shape that future was also a product of the ambiguity that the fall of France introduced into a civil-military balance that traditionally marginalized the military. Combined with the strategic vacuum left by the new constitutional relationship with Great Britain, the summer of 1940 saw what might have been the first true debate about how Canada should exercise its independence in pursuit of national interests. If the country's primary strategic goal was to ensure the defeat of Germany, the most immediate priority was to stave off the defeat of Great Britain. Mackenzie King, however, recalling the severe political divisions of the First World War, believed that his goal was to bring Canada through the war intact. Crerar, among others, pursued different goals – he believed that Canada must emerge from the war with a more robust military and a recognition that responsibility for national defence was shared between politicians and the military. And, he believed, the country needed a greater appreciation of the costs of sovereignty. He saw himself as a steward of the Canadian army, and this too shaped his goals. He met resistance, not least from Mackenzie King, and this shaped his methods. And the nature of the war itself shaped the results. In the end, he was a general who acted as if he wielded an instrument of national power in the national interest, before these concepts had been given concrete form by a country and government that had no machinery to develop or articulate them. He conceived a field army that could achieve what in today's parlance would be strategic effect, a military that is relevant. That is a military force that can make a strategic contribution to the defeat of the enemy, as well maintains its capabilities and continue to fulfil national roles,

including increasing Canada's international influence and capacity to shape the international environment. The results took the form of First Canadian Army, as well as a significant naval and air effort, but that effort came at a cost. Canada's role in 1940 was not clear. Crerar played an important, indeed critical, part in defining the country's war effort. The issues he grappled with – how does Canada engage the world? what are its interests? and how could it best exercise its interest on the international stage? – were as complex and as difficult then as they are today.

Crerar was, like all of us, a child of his particular time. From Crerar's perspective, the predominant theme during his life was the emergence and evolution of a Canadian nationalism that distanced itself from its British origins. That this theme was one of the crucial subtexts in Crerar's life was no surprise given both his family background and his chosen profession. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries Canada was evolving and a nascent Canadian national identity was maturing, or at least emerging. Crerar was engaged in some of the turning points of that growth. For the better part of his life, Crerar, like many of his contemporaries, saw no conflict in being British and Canadian. Today, we tend to understand the relationship as evolving sequentially from one to the other, but it was rarely that neat. In the 1930s, he described himself as a "British subject, and a Canadian national" – these were not incompatible. Linda Colley suggested, in her study of the emergence of a British identity, that identities are not like hats; you can wear more than one.<sup>2</sup>

Crerar's life was shaped by Canada's constitutional and political development. Born in Hamilton, Ontario in 1888, he was raised by fiercely imperialist parents, educated at Upper Canada College and the Royal Military College, went to war in 1914 and joined the permanent force in 1919.<sup>3</sup> Queen Victoria was on the throne when he was born. As Crerar grew up under Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the country had no navy, no constitutional role in foreign policy, and the United States was considered a major threat. It had no air force; flight was in its infancy. Crerar was 11 when the Boer War broke out; he was 22 when MPs became salaried; and he went overseas in 1914 at the age of 26. He was 32 when the universal

franchise was introduced and 43 when the Statute of Westminster was enacted. He was 58 when Canadian Citizenship Act became law and the current Canadian flag was adopted the year of his death in 1965.

Crerar certainly represented a particular constituency in Canada, but the clarity and assurance he brought to bear on events following 1940 was the result of personal encounters with the history of the period. The First World War and the interwar period – and it was when it became the "interwar" period that its influence was most keenly felt – were formative ones for Crerar. His ideas on the military were planted before his wrenching experiences during the First World War, but the trauma of that conflict cemented in his mind the belief that a strong, or at least professional, military was necessary to protect Canada's interests and promote Canadian sovereignty.

His desire to promote defence preparations was also intensely personal. The First World War was a family trauma for the Crerars. His younger brother Malcolm was killed, another severely wounded, and the stress and losses undoubtedly contributed to his mother's death in 1919. Crerar himself was nearly killed at the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915 and lost many friends over the next three years. The war's impact was evident in his diary entry from June 1915, as he pondered the deaths of friends and his experiences of the past two months:

The pity of this killing business gets me sometimes. War is so very truly hell and this yard by yard fighting finds it at its worst. The gains are so small when it comes to distance – it just resolves itself into a case of counting corpses, if we have fewer than they, it's a "victory." There is no romance in such as that. We'll beat them some day but they'll never be able to pay their just debt, the swine, not in this world anyway.<sup>4</sup>

Even at the end of the Second World War, Crerar refused to meet with his counterparts on the German side to take their surrender, sending his corps commanders, Lieutenant-Generals Charles Foulkes and Guy Simonds – "I saw no purpose in meeting any German generals unless I had to on some official capacity," he recalled, "...I have had them in adjoining fields...that was enough."<sup>5</sup>

The First World War was personally traumatic for Crerar, but it became futile only in retrospect

as a new war loomed. The memory of formidable reputation Canada's army had gained and the loss of professionalism in the 1920s and 30s, as well as the personal costs shaped his agenda, from his appointment as chief of the general staff to army command. Crerar was authentic in his pursuit of a mature national defence policy process and military professionalism. He may have been calculating in his pursuit of his objectives, but he was also principled. He was ambitious, but it was harnessed to a purpose.

Crerar joined the permanent force soon after the war ended. He had a slow but steady rise as a staff officer. Postings to Ottawa and the UK, particularly time at the Staff College, Camberley and the Imperial Defence College, marked him as an officer on the rise. The promise of the immediate postwar period, when Crerar could boast of the newfound professionalism of the Canadian permanent force, however, gave way to disillusionment in the late 1920s and frustration by the 1930s. As the international environment grew more ominous, the military's influence remained marginal, leading Crerar to characterize this period as the "stagnant backwaters of the interwar army."

Crerar was as proud of the record of Canadian Corps as he was distraught at the cost of obtaining it. And as he watched its professionalism dissipated, his frustration grew. For Crerar, this process paralleled, and was fuelled by,



Lieutenant-Colonel H.D.G. Crerar, photographed in London during the First World War.

the growing autonomy from Britain. However, this trend seemed to develop with little sense of what autonomy and sovereignty meant. From a defence perspective, there was nothing to fill the vacuum that would be left if the relationship to the British was completely abandoned. These concerns were evident in a speech given in 1926 to the Royal United Service Institute and later published in *Canadian Defence Quarterly*:

The great war terminated with the military forces of the Empire a unified fighting organization... [Despite the current divisions, public sentiment would insist that Canada fight with the UK] when war again threatens, however, our responsibility as soldiers stands clear – against that day to prepare the military machinery of the Empire for its highest effectiveness.<sup>6</sup>

Crerar had been overseas for several years at that point, but his pronouncements caught the attention of O.D. Skelton, under

secretary of state for External Affairs, in Ottawa, who described them as "out and out advocacy of Imperialist [sic] policy in defence."<sup>7</sup> General staff officers' talks were carefully monitored for any discussions of policy, an approach which prompted most senior officers to err on the side of caution. A year later, General Andrew McNaughton cancelled a proposed talk on "Canadian defence problems."<sup>8</sup>

As Canada's constitutional position changed during the 1920s and 1930s, Crerar's nationalism





Major-General Crerar shakes hands with Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King.

also took a different form. He was more politically aware and more pragmatic. He reconsidered the military's relationship to a maturing nation and concluded that the proof of that maturity was its willingness to defend itself. He saw Canada's defence preparations in the context of a more mature partnership. He still remained committed to the Commonwealth, but believed that national sovereignty was more than a declaration in a document. It was the result of public engagement and the implementation of serious policies. If Canada was now a partner with Great Britain, then at the very least it had to take its responsibilities seriously. Local defence was the least it could do. It was not clear that the government shared this view. To be fair, neither did much of the public. During his tenure as the Director Military Operations & Intelligence from 1935 to 1938, he worked hard to promote his ideas, convinced that the logic of his ideas would bear fruit if enough people were exposed to them. However, the results were minimal.

Germany's invasion of Poland brought some clarity to the issue, but not as much as the nostalgic glow which memories of that war suggest. Canada's role was not immediately clear. Prime Minister Mackenzie King intended that Canada's effort, and liability, would be strictly

limited. He pressed hard to ensure that Canada's contribution would be industrial and agricultural; militarily, he focused on the air force as the cheapest and most cost-effective contribution Canada could make, at least in terms of lives. In the spring of 1940, Mackenzie King argued to a Cabinet War Committee torn over whether to create a two-division corps that even this was excessive: "We could have used our money more effectively if it had all been confined to air and naval services." He conceded that the "national spirit, however, demanded an expeditionary force; would demand it having full national expression. I stressed the necessity of maintaining the pride and the morale of the little force we have by making them a complete entity." J.L. Ralston, then minister of finance, agreed.<sup>9</sup>

The fall of France in June 1940 lifted some of the constraints on Canada's war effort, but King did not immediately expand the military. Memories of First World War casualty lists and divisive debates over conscription were foremost in his mind. At the height of the crisis, on 5 June, Mackenzie King spoke to the Liberal caucus on the "necessity of keeping Canada united and our war effort being based on that: of balancing all matters, going just as far as we could, and not so far as to create a worse situation than the one we were trying to remedy."<sup>10</sup> It is not clear if Mackenzie King truly believed that a united Canada was worth the cost of a defeated Britain and a Nazi-dominated Europe, but, if he meant it in a narrow sense, there was some logic to his view that broken armed forces could be rebuilt faster than the country. In either case, in his mind, the limits of Canada's war effort were prescribed by this goal.

Crerar had no doubts that Canada's army contribution had to be significant and that Canada should share the costs and risks with the British. He saw a large army as a critical contribution to the defeat of Germany, and a

logical step after the effort in the First World War, one that might prevent a “return to the stagnant backwaters” of the interwar period. Crerar believed that Germany would only be defeated when its army was defeated. It is also clear that he saw Canada’s contribution in terms of a British Commonwealth coalition, dictated by both sentiment and the logic that Canada’s military was organized, equipped and trained along British lines. He believed that Canada’s effort must be shaped by its own interests. And Crerar knew the effects he sought.

This was evident from the first days of the war. When Crerar was sent to Great Britain in 1939 to establish what became Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ), he lobbied hard for the infrastructure for a larger effort than the one or two divisions envisioned by the Canadian government, and to establish principles for Canadian autonomy.<sup>11</sup> He was embarrassed by the parsimony of the government, not least because he recognized the contradictory impulses of seeking autonomy while insisting that someone else foot the bill. In the spring of 1940, for example, before a corps was formed, he and Lester Pearson, first secretary at the Canadian High Commission in

Britain, warned of the poor impression being left by the government’s insistence that the British pay for non-divisional support troops.<sup>12</sup> The best example of how he saw the exercise of autonomy occurred as the French armies were collapsing following the evacuation at Dunkirk. In June 1940, as the British considered returning to the continent to shore up the collapsing French armies, Crerar advised them, “In my view, and I believe the view of the Canadian Government, the Canadian forces now available over here should be regarded as available to accept the same responsibilities, however dangerous, as those which it was proposed to allot to similar British formations.”<sup>13</sup> The Canadian government was less confident, but Crerar forged ahead. And by the summer of 1940, he was in a position to pursue his aspirations.

Appointed chief of the general staff in July 1940, Crerar took an expansive view of his responsibilities. He saw himself as a steward of the army’s professionalism and as the government’s chief military advisor, a combination that informed his approach to army expansion. Crerar genuinely believed a large ground force was necessary to defeat Germany. He was

Prime Minister King reviews an honour guard from the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Régiment during a visit to their training camp in Surrey, England, 26 August 1941.







J.L. Ralston, minister of national defence, visits the troops in England.

He established conditions for expansion, enlarged the training infrastructure and the period of training from one month to four; cultivated media and political support; and enhanced his position relative to other chiefs and branch heads to ensure he was the chief military advisor. Most important, in successful struggles for army expansion in fiscal years 1940-1, and 1941-2, he convinced a reluctant J.L. Ralston, minister of national defence, and many on the Cabinet War Committee, first that a large field army effort was necessary and then that it was feasible without resort to conscription. This was no mean feat, and the other services copied his approach, with similar

equally committed to ensuring that when the war ended, the armed forces did not return to their previous state. "We must not lose a moment," he emphasized in a memorandum for the minister of national defence written as Crerar returned from the UK, "in undertaking a thorough analysis of Canada's post-war military requirements and in planning a defence organization which will produce our future service needs with a maximum of efficiency and a minimum of expense." A truer expression of his feelings was excised from the first draft of the memo: "Even should victory be gained it is as certain as anything can be that...the armed forces of Canada...will not be allowed to slip back into the stagnant backwaters of their pre-war existence."

Over the next year and a half Crerar set about trying to make that goal a reality.

McNaughton's by-election loss in February 1945 was viewed by many as a rebuke of King's war policies and his handling of conscription. McNaughton was "mystified" at his loss, but he was pilloried by many editorial writers, including those from the *Globe* (the cartoon accompanied the editorial), for what they characterized as his failure to support his army. Despite what seemed like a vote of confidence for Crerar's view of the role of the military in rendering professional advice to their political masters, as suggested by the cartoon, his influence was on the wane. Note: the Crerar identified in the cartoon is T.A. Crerar, not Harry Crerar.

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successes. Concerned over the general staff's continual call for more men, an exasperated Ralston admitted to Grant Dexter in 1941, "[I am] minister but must act upon the advice of [my] staff of professional soldiers. Being a civilian, [I cannot] set aside [my] advisors simply because [I] disagreed with what they said. They knew; [I] did not know."<sup>14</sup> Ralston's comment captured





Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies Photograph Collection

Queen Elizabeth flanked by Generals Andrew McNaughton and Harry Crerar.

perhaps the most significant change that had occurred in the summer of 1940 – the military were viewed as the principal advisors to the minister, sharing responsibility for defence policy. Soon the army, as well as the navy and air force, expanded to unprecedented sizes. First Canadian Army, Canada's first field army, became a reality in 1942. Crerar had by then been appointed general officer commanding (GOC) 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, and, after some debate, as Acting GOC 1st Canadian Corps.

Crerar's goals and influence also manifested themselves in the pursuit of operational experience for the Canadian army. The relationship between his pursuit of the expansion of the army, the dispatch of troops to Hong Kong and participation of Canadian troops in the Dieppe raid is not often remarked upon, but they were tied together in Crerar's mind not just as necessary for maintaining morale, and public interest in the army, but also for their effect on Canada's status as a partner with the British and their

potential impact on the postwar status of the military. By late 1940, Crerar was concerned about the army's inexperience and during 1941 and 1942 contrasted its relative inactivity with the sustained combat of the First World War Canadian Corps and the heavy fighting by other Commonwealth armies during the early years of the Second World War. Here he was out in front of the government. In December 1940, when in the UK to seek British opinions of the expansion of the army, Crerar pressed Sir John Dill, chief of the imperial general staff, on whether there was any desire to use Canadians in Libya. When Dill indicated that the British preferred that the Canadian formations remained in the UK, Crerar stressed that he "knew of no desire on the part of the Canadian government to discourage the use of its forces 'in any operations in which they could usefully play a part, no matter where the theatre might be.'"<sup>15</sup> Mackenzie King was less certain, opposing any such commitment, reasoning that Canada had no interests in the "Empire War" and that "we owed it to our men to seek to protect





Lieutenant-General H.D.G. Crerar explains the plan for Operation "Totalize" to war correspondents assembled at First Canadian Army Headquarters, Amblie, France, 7 August 1944.

their lives." Further he suggested, somewhat oddly, that fighting in the interests of the empire might even "engender annexationist sentiment in Canada."<sup>16</sup>

Crerar's perspective was also evident in his support for the decision to send Canadian troops to Hong Kong as part of the Anglo-American attempt to deter the Japanese from entering the war. When asked in September 1941 whether Canada could spare troops to reinforce the garrison at Hong Kong, Crerar warned of the attendant military risks, and suggested that no commitment should hinder the preparations and build-up of Canadian forces in the UK. Still, he believed that if the British had already made the decision to reinforce the garrison, then the question of whether Canadian troops should be sent was ultimately a political and moral

decision.<sup>17</sup> There were other influences, of course. He believed that that the army needed action during crucial period of expansion, and his own study of the Pacific situation and Hong Kong's position convinced him that Japanese would choose the rational course since they could not beat the British Commonwealth and the United States, an opinion shared by many Japanese leaders. But Crerar believed it was ultimately a moral and strategic question, and he framed it in coalition terms, echoing his comments of June 1940: if the British (and the United States) had decided it was worth the risk to reinforce their forces in the Pacific, how could Canada say no?

When overseas in 1942, as the acting GOC, 1st Canadian Corps, the same concerns and logic informed his ongoing support of raids and then the Dieppe operation, even as it outgrew

the concept of the small, limited coastal raids in which he had hoped his troops could obtain some experience. He believed Canadian morale, domestically and in the army, was hurt by the knowledge that Canadian troops trained and waited while others fought. He saw small raids, like First World War trench raids, as providing experience and action, enhancing morale.<sup>18</sup> And so much the better if it stimulated domestic support for army in Canada, and maintained voluntary enlistment, something made even more important, ironically, by the potentially negative impact of the Royal Commission investigating the dispatch of troops to Hong Kong.<sup>19</sup> And finally, he felt Canada must take the same risks as the British and the Allied coalition.

The results of the Dieppe raid, combined with the diminished threat of Allied defeat by 1943, changed the civil-military dynamic back in favour of the politicians. This manifested itself in the tighter control over commitments exerted by the government. This did not translate into

a refusal to commit, but it did remove some of the discretionary authority of the senior commanders of the overseas forces. Indeed, there was at the same time a growing concert of voices that it was in the national interest to commit the Canadian forces in some decisive fashion, a policy which also ran counter to the view of some in the military, most notably General Andrew McNaughton, the senior Canadian army officer in England. After Dieppe, Mackenzie King wrote in his diary "somehow I cannot help feeling that it would have been better had all our forces been kept intact, until the moment when it was absolutely advisable to attempt invasion." He did concede it might prove to "be for the best...in the long run." But, in the fall of 1942, he prevented McNaughton from accompanying Churchill to the Soviet Union where the latter planned to examine a possible "northern" campaign; King was wary lest McNaughton's involvement be construed as a commitment.<sup>20</sup> By 1943, King made it clear that he was prepared to defer to British views as to how Canadian forces could be best employed, "as

Crerar (left) examines a map with Air Marshal Arthur Coningham, commander of 2nd Tactical Air Force, General B.L.M. Montgomery, commander of 21st Army Group and Air Chief Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory, commander of the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces, Normandy, August 1944.







The senior officers of First Canadian Army, photographed in May 1945. (l. to r. - seated) H.S. Maczek, Guy Simonds, Harry Crerar, Charles Foulkes, Bert Hoffmeister; (standing) R.H. Keefer, A.B. Matthews, H.W. Foster, R.W. Moncel, S.B. Rawlins.

one great Army" or "divided up," an indication of his mistrust of his own generals.<sup>21</sup> McNaughton was opposed to such a division, but Crerar continued to favour splitting the army, and the government, while it remained equivocal, asserted its control over any decision that might lead to a commitment or the perception of a commitment.

McNaughton continued to resist the breakup of the Canadian army through mid-1943, a position which diminished his status in the eyes of the British and many Canadians. Crerar felt that McNaughton was now "unable to stand back and view the whole picture." Indeed, Crerar told High Commissioner Vincent Massey that he disagreed with almost all of McNaughton's ideas about the army.<sup>22</sup> Brooke noted McNaughton's almost "fanatic antagonism for employing any portion of the Canadian Forces independent from the whole." Like Crerar, Brooke believed that the employment of a Canadian division was becoming an absolute necessity to "provide an outlet to post officers and men to gain experience."<sup>23</sup> Crerar pushed for a Canadian deployment to the Italian

theatre in 1943, against the wishes of his mentor McNaughton. In the end, Crerar's view prevailed, but his success reflected, at least in part, the government's wariness of too much dependence on advice from their own generals. In July 1943 1st Canadian Infantry Division, followed later by 1st Canadian Corps, was dispatched to the Mediterranean. McNaughton was soon sent back to Canada, and, after much discussion with the British senior command, Crerar was selected to replace him.

When Crerar officially became army commander in March 1944, his aggressive views on deployments were evidently a concern for the Mackenzie King government. In April 1944, the government demanded a statement from Crerar on the feasibility of the Normandy operation, indicating that this would allow them to issue instructions regarding Crerar's responsibilities to the government and First Canadian Army's position within 21st Army Group. The government was basically asking for a guarantee of the operation's success. Crerar feared he was being prepared as a sacrificial lamb



in the event that the landing failed and balked at providing such assurances.<sup>24</sup> He eventually delivered a qualified assessment. Field Marshal Montgomery also tried to use Mackenzie King's doubts to limit Crerar's right of recourse over Montgomery's head to the Canadian government, and, somewhat astonishingly, almost succeeded with Mackenzie King's help. Crerar's determined rejoinders to Montgomery – "Though in practice I expect to be treated, and behave, as any other Army Commander, in principle I...am not. I am the Canadian Army Commander and, as such, am in a different category to the British Army Commander"<sup>25</sup> – prompted concern amongst Crerar's colleagues that the British might lose confidence in the Canadian military leadership's judgment if the military appeared more "constitutionally minded than [their] political masters."<sup>26</sup>

To Crerar, and many of his colleagues, the question was as much one of national sovereignty as respect for their professional prerogatives. How could Canada clamour for recognition of its autonomy, but not accept the consequent responsibility and develop mechanisms accordingly? Of course, Prime Minister Mackenzie King recognized this equation, but unlike his First World War counterpart, Sir Robert Borden, consultation was enough for King. He did not seek influence. His goal was to avoid divisions at home. The Canadian senior command drew different conclusions from the experience of the First World War and was often out in front of their political masters in seeking strategic influence and recognition as the logical consequence of Canada's contributions to the war effort.

These issues simmered for months, reemerging as the reinforcement crisis in the late summer and early fall of 1944 prompted an outcry in Canada. They peaked with the conscription crisis in the fall of 1944. Crerar, though he would not comment publicly, believed conscription was necessary and saw the issue largely in terms of public education. Despite the introduction of conscription, the influence of the military was clearly on the wane. This was evident as the end of the war loomed. By early, 1945 Crerar pressed for the army to be reunited, and sought government promises on the shape of postwar army as well as the occupation and

Pacific forces. His desire to maximize the effect of the returning soldiers while retaining as much expertise for the postwar army as possible also shaped his approach to demobilization. Crerar was confident that the civil-military dynamic had changed, and he encouraged his son Peter to stay in the permanent force: "I believe that the Canadian Active Army of the future will be a much finer organization than the old Permanent Force of the past."<sup>27</sup>

Still, as the war ended, Crerar feared that the country might lapse into its traditional malaise when it came to defence and the military. In his view, national perspectives and policies remained absent, a result of the expansion of the vote with no concurrent expansion of civic education, a narrow, self-interested outlook exacerbated by the introduction of salaries for members of Parliament.<sup>28</sup> At war's end, as he sought to preserve the core of the army's professionalism, he believed that the necessary corollary was the promotion of ideas on civics to the "average" Canadian soldier whose lack of knowledge of national and international affairs, and poor physical condition had come as a shock to him. Crerar introduced civic education courses such as "The Organization and Operation of Different Systems of National Government," and "The Place of Religion in Society." Attendance was voluntary, but characterized as "high." As the soldiers became restless waiting to be returned to Canada, Crerar reminded his commanders of the importance of providing the soldiers with information "or guidance" on citizenship, religion, rehabilitation and demobilization. To Crerar, the veterans would provide the foundation for a more mature postwar defence policy.<sup>29</sup> Even after the war, Crerar continued to promote his view that military service was one of the best means of producing national awareness.

After 1945, however, the appetite for views like Crerar's was limited. It seemed as if Canada could avoid major conflicts, carving out a military role as an honest broker in international relations while remaining committed to the western alliance, its military contribution significant but, with the notable exception of Korea, untested in war. The end of the Cold War, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and Canada's mission in Afghanistan have again raised important questions about Canada's defence policy, its security interests and

the role its military in particular should play in securing those interests. The past should provide perspective on these issues, but only if properly understood. For Canadians, the Second World War remains the measure of what war is, and should be: an unequivocal cause, an unambiguous threat, clear goals, a population united to achieve that goal, an all-out effort, definable steps towards a victory and a precise ending. These are comforting memories in complex times, but false ones. The warm nostalgic glow that seems to be enveloping that period combined with the clarity that comes from knowing the outcome of decisions and the distance from events masks the difficult and complex issues decision-makers faced during the war. Determining Canada's contribution to staving off Britain's defeat and then winning the war against the Axis was anything but clear-cut. There was nothing pre-determined about Canada's Second World War effort, however proudly we now look back on that very substantial contribution. It does not diminish that effort to examine the discussions surrounding how Canada could best advance and safeguard its interests. It is somewhat anachronistic to discuss the war in terms of interests as there was no real strategic culture during that period nor was there a tradition of trying to formally define Canada's interests. But that does not mean that Canada had no interests or that no one had ideas on what they might be. There was dissension if not public debate surrounding the direction Canada's war effort should take, and if the resulting contributions brought Canada benefits and influence, they also came at a cost. And that too is a point that should not be lost as we continue to debate how best Canada and Canadians should engage with the world.

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17. LAC, RG33-120, vol.3, Crerar's Testimony, 11 Apl. 1942; see also Paul Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General: A Biography of General H.D.G. Crerar* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp.161-175.
18. LAC, RG24, Vol.13,683, War Diary "G" Branch HQ 1st Canadian Corps, June 1942. Crerar to all Commanders and Commanding Officers, 4 June 1942; see also LAC, CP vol.6, Crerar to A.J. Crerar, 8 December 1942.
19. For an overview see, "Dieppe" in Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General*, pp. 198-203.
20. Pickersgill, *The Mackenzie King Record*, pp.417-21.
21. *Ibid.*, p.503.
22. University of Toronto Archives, Vincent Massey Papers, Folder 48, Diary, 12 May 1943.
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25. LAC, CP Vol.3, D67, Crerar to Stuart, 30 May 1944.
26. LAC, CP Vol.3, D67, Stuart to Crerar, 29 May 1944.
27. LAC, CP Vol.8, D176, Crerar to Price Montague, 15 May 1945.
28. LAC, CP Vol.19, D338, Crerar to Zouch Palmer, 27 March 1941.
29. LAC, CP vol, 26, D390, "Civic Education and Military Preparation"; Vol.4, D106, Demobilization File.

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